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Telling the Truth about Broadband

Madison – Senator Janet Bewley recently put out an article attacking Wisconsin's Broadband Expansion Grant program. She argued that broadband investment hasn't come to Northwest Wisconsin and suggested that instead, Governor Walker was using this money to line the pockets of his donors and friendly lobbyists.

I've worked in politics long enough to not be shocked that a politician is playing games to score cheap political points. What's surprising and disappointing, though, is the fact that the Senator seems to think her constituents are too dumb to look at *all* the facts, and make their own decision. So instead she cherry-picked facts and distorted reality in order to make a program that is working for Wisconsinites across the state look bad, just because it was created by a Republican. So let's take a look at the whole picture and see what's really going on.

First, thanks in large part to my leadership in the Rural Wisconsin Initiative, funding for Broadband Expansion Grants have grown drastically, from \$500,000 annually in 2014 to \$1.5 million per year today. That means that the number of projects has been able to double – from 7 in 2014 to 13 this year. Last year, 17 grants were awarded. Unfortunately, Sen. Bewley refused to support the Rural Wisconsin Initiatives calls for more broadband funding.

Sen. Bewley gets other facts wrong, too. It's true that our district didn't get any grants this year, but we've gotten many grants throughout the process. Three projects in Barron County alone were funded. Three more projects were funded in Bayfield County, which apparently isn't important enough for the Senator. In fact, a total of 17 of the 55 total grants the state has given out came to Northwest Wisconsin – nearly 33% of the total grants.

The other grants went to other underserved areas – small towns and farming communities just like ours, where people work hard every day to give their children access to the same opportunities they had growing up. Communities across Wisconsin lack broadband, and there are indeed parts of Dane County where students are missing out on the educational opportunities high-speed internet access offers, where parents are not able to set up an online business, where grandparents aren't able to use Skype to chat with their grandchildren. In fact, while 18% of rural Bayfield County residents lack high-speed internet, 32% of rural Dane County residents are also without high-speed access.

We won't get every single dollar of development money the state spends – that's the reality, but it's one I'm not going to pretend doesn't exist. But if we believe that *everyone* deserves access to the same opportunities, we must make sure that all rural areas are able to take advantage of the Broadband Expansion Grant program.

The simple fact is this: these grants are for all rural people, whether they're in Dane County, Bayfield County, or Barron County. It's our duty as responsible legislators to ensure that every Wisconsinite has the same opportunity – whether that's good roads, good schools, or good internet access. That's what I'm fighting for.